



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Park Commissioners
FROM: Susan Golub
DATE: January 2, 2014
SUBJECT: New Ballot Measure Oversight

Requested Board Action

Seattle Parks and Recreation (Parks) is evaluating options for oversight of the new ballot measure anticipated for a public vote in August 2014. Parks requests a recommendation from the Board of Park Commissioners (Board) as to the best option for oversight.

Background

As directed by City Council Resolution 31454 (May 2013), a citizens' committee is evaluating the need for and content of a new Parks funding measure. The new funding measure, whether a renewal of the current parks levy or the creation of a metropolitan parks district (MPD), will include citizen oversight, following the predominant practice in the City. For Parks, citizen oversight of ballot measures has provided a valuable connection to the public throughout implementation of projects and programs and is a welcome as well as necessary component of achieving success.

The City has employed a number of means to provide citizen oversight of ballot measures. Table 1 shows the make-up of some current City citizen oversight committees. Committee make-up ranges from a standing board (library levy) to a committee which includes the Mayor and a City Councilmember (Families and Education Levy).

Table 1: City Ballot Measure Oversight Committees		
Ballot Measure	Citizen Oversight Provided By	Membership
2008 Parks and Green Spaces Levy	Parks and Green Spaces Levy Oversight Committee	16 members: 8 appointed by the Mayor and 8 appointed by the City Council; 3-year terms
2012 Library Levy	Library Board	5 members: all appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council; 5-year terms
2011 Families and Education Levy	Families and Ed. Levy Oversight Committee	12 members: the Mayor, one City Council member, one School Board member, the School Superintendent, plus 8 citizens
2006 Bridging the Gap Transportation Levy	Bridging the Gap Oversight Committee	15 members: 5 appointed by the Mayor, 5 appointed by the City Council, plus one representative from each of three advisory boards: Bicycle, Pedestrian Freight Mobility; plus one City Council member and the City Budget Director
2009 Housing Levy	Housing Levy Oversight Committee	13 members: one City employee appointed by the Mayor, one City employee appointed by the City Council, 6 non-government employees appointed by the Mayor and 5 non-governmental employees appointed by the City Council
2011 Transportation Benefit District	None	

Anticipated Duties

The responsibilities of the oversight committee for a Parks funding measure would likely include:

1. Annual budget review/recommendation
2. Assessment of performance measures
3. Reporting to the Mayor and Council on implementation issues/concerns
4. Leading Challenge/Opportunity fund allocation processes

Options to Consider for Parks

As shown in Table 1, the City employs a variety of ways to include citizen oversight for funding measures. Parks is offering 3 options for the Board to consider:

1. Park Board providing oversight – the Library model;
2. A separate oversight committee – Parks' current model; and

3. A hybrid which would have the Board or a committee of the Board supplemented with additional members from the public.

1. Park Board Oversight

Board oversight fits with the Superintendent's vision of the Board taking on stewardship of the new funding mechanism which, as the Superintendent has described, would include an expanded role in department accountability, communication and reporting to the public, Mayor and City Council. The Board could take on oversight duties at the second meeting of the month, as needed. Current levy oversight has not always required monthly meetings, and may be needed less with a Board already aware of and involved with Parks issues. Board oversight is the model used for the library levy.

Advantages:

- The upcoming ballot measure is significantly more complex than past parks levies in that, as currently being considered, it would include a complex mix of maintenance projects, programs and partnerships. This would be a departure from the past two parks levies which were primarily (2000 Pro Parks) and solely (2008 Parks and Green Spaces Levy) comprised of capital projects. The Board has a city-wide, comprehensive view of Parks and extensive background/knowledge of the parks system that would be beneficial in overseeing a complex funding measure.
- With the new ballot measure expected to fund projects and programs in every aspect of Parks, having the Board provide oversight avoids potential conflicts over authority: which issues are the purview of the Board to oversee and which belong with a separate oversight committee.

Disadvantages:

- With the expected expansion of the Board's workload into the areas of department accountability, communication, and reporting, adding oversight of the ballot measure increases the workload and may significantly tax our volunteers.
- Keeping oversight within the 9-member Board does not involve a broader group of citizens, as has occurred with the previous two parks levy oversight committees.

2. A Separate Oversight Committee

A separate committee is the predominant method used for oversight of City ballot measures and is consistent with Parks' previous levy oversight.

Advantages:

- A separate committee involves a broader range of the public than with Board oversight.

Disadvantages:

- The complexity of the proposed ballot measure requires significantly more understanding of Parks than previous capital-focused measures. This does not mean that a levy-focused citizens' committee couldn't get up to speed, just that it will be more difficult.
- With every aspect of Parks touched by the ballot measure, it may be confusing to distinguish what issues should be addressed by the Park Board and what should be addressed by the oversight committee.

3. Park Board Committee with Added Members

Either the full Board or a subcommittee of the Board could be supplemented with citizens to form the ballot measure oversight committee.

Advantages:

- This hybrid model retains the city-wide/system-wide perspective and knowledge base of the Board, and adds a broader community perspective.
- A subcommittee of the Board supplemented by non-Board members puts less pressure on Board members' volunteer time.

Disadvantages:

- As compared with a separate committee, a hybrid would not have as many citizens involved in oversight.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommend moving forward with option 1, Park Board oversight, with the understanding that if Board workload and volunteer time commitment become too burdensome, the hybrid model will be implemented.